

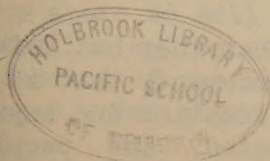
To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which
inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church;
to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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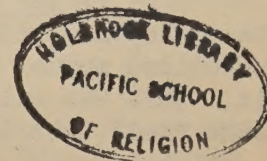
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November 1951



The Antigonish Movement

By Benson Y. Landis*



The Antigonish Movement has emphasized "adult education through economic cooperation." The movement was initiated by the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The educational institution is a liberal arts college. A group of its officials became interested, a generation ago, in the economic conditions of the farmers, fishermen, and miners of the Maritimes. The program was started intensively over twenty years ago in the seven eastern counties of Nova Scotia. Most of the people of eastern Nova Scotia came from Scotland. About sixty per cent of the people of this section are of Scotch descent and Roman Catholic. The movement has influenced all of the Maritime Provinces, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and even Newfoundland.

About twenty-five years ago the plight of the fishermen of the Maritimes received national attention. It was of sufficient import to move the government to appoint a Royal Commission. The Royal Commission received testimony that even in the late 1920's fishermen's families generally had about \$200 in cash for family living. The Royal Commission advocated voluntary organization of the fishermen for their own protection. The educators at St. Francis Xavier seemed to be the natural leaders to stimulate this organization.

A few distinguished Catholic educators were the moving spirits in the early days, particularly Dr. J. J. Tompkins and Msgr. M. M. Coady. Dr. Tompkins was the pioneer. As vice-president of the University, he was an early pilgrim to Denmark. He first sought to bring the people to the University; later found he must take the University to the people; still later learned that some leaders will come to the University for short courses or training. As parish priest at Canso he initiated local experiments of great value. Dr. Coady

* Dr. Benson Y. Landis prepared this important interpretation of the Antigonish Movement for the Seminar on Rural Community Life of Columbia University. Today, when many see the need for a greater degree of mutual self-help as a basis for more wholesome community life, the Antigonish experience has special relevance. We are indebted to Dr. Landis, who is executive director of the Department of Town and Country of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., for sharing this appraisal with the members of The Christian Rural Fellowship.

- I.W.M.

went with boundless energy into almost every fishing village in the early 1930's so that he might see social conditions for himself. Msgr. Coady is the orator who blazed trails for organizers of study groups. He has been the leader who supplied the philosophy and encouraged the search for techniques.

The extension educators, having decided that university teachers should search for practical means to improve economic conditions among groups of primary producers, went on the hunt for methods.

THE TECHNIQUES

1. The mass meeting. Here the people were told that they had defaulted that they had within themselves the means of their own improvement, that if they practiced mutual aid they could both understand their own situation and improve it. This was only the first step. Study groups were advocated. The people were "told what they ought to want."

2. The small informal study group, no more than ten to a group, meeting in homes, usually under lay leaders whom the people elected. Study outlines went out from the Extension Division, also package libraries and a periodical. Soon there were about 1,000 study clubs with 10,000 members.

3. The credit union. This was a most important discovery. "After we discovered the credit union, the movement was established." It was itself based upon study. The credit union could make loans to cooperatives and other community organizations, as well as to individuals.

4. The radio station. Radio talks to listening study groups are now the rule. The station is owned by many people of the province.

5. Projects for every study group. These were varied: credit unions; conservation of the soil; group-buying of seeds, feed, fertilizer; cooperative stores; farmers' marketing associations; housing associations; voluntary health insurance; fishermen's federations; packing plants; marketing of handicrafts. Cooperative organization was advocated by the educators. They did not originate the cooperatives in Nova Scotia but gave them impetus.

STUDY CLUBS RESULT IN NUMEROUS ORGANIZATIONS

In the Maritimes there are 425 credit unions; thirty housing co-ops with over 200 homes for members; about 250,000 people in voluntary health associations.

In Nova Scotia there are fifty farmers' marketing cooperatives; 108 stores; twenty-three fishermen's federations, lobster and other canneries; thirteen other types.

The transformation of a number of communities has been accomplished. For example, "Morell (Prince Edward Island) is one of those numerous villages in the Maritimes where the people are a mixed group of farmers and fishermen. The farmers outnumber the fishermen, however, by 250 to forty. The red soil of Prince Edward Island is productive, and the native potatoes are widely exported.

"Until 1938 the people of Morell were seriously divided along religious

lines. The village is seventy per cent Catholic, thirty per cent Protestant. In 1938, when a credit union was organized among some of the Catholics, the community atmosphere was such that the credit union office was located on the Catholic side of town, and there was bitter resistance to the idea of placing it on a site more convenient to the Protestants.

"But as the credit union grew and as work in the study clubs brought home to the members the implications of cooperation, Protestants and Catholics began to work together harmoniously. By 1940 the credit union had two hundred members and nearly \$5,000 in capital. The time was ripe for opening a cooperative store to sell food and general merchandise. So far had cooperation between Catholics and Protestants developed in a scant two years that no one disputed the necessity of setting the store in a central location, equally convenient to both groups. Religious discord had evaporated.

"Other cooperative developments have followed: a cooperative creamery and a cooperative fish cannery. The new spirit of harmony in Morell has had widespread effects. Together the people of Morell have built themselves a new community hall, a new high school, and a new outdoor skating rink. In the summer of 1948 they built a potato warehouse on the railroad siding next to the cooperative store; its capacity is sixty carloads.

"Among the services available from the cooperatives in Morell now are savings and credit, insurance, butter marketing, locker storage, egg-grading and marketing, lobster and fish canning and marketing, purchase of farm supplies including fertilizer, purchase of food, and in the near future potato storage and a feed mill. Before itemizing some of the savings made by the community through these cooperative activities, it should be stressed that the financial rewards account for only a part of the satisfaction that the people of Morell get from their cooperatives; a very large part results from the feeling of pride of ownership. It is this element that accounts for the puzzling fact that occasionally you will find a cooperative struggling to find its feet in a situation where there is really no economic necessity for a cooperative at all. The psychological necessity is something quite distinct--the need for ownership. Even where local private business is doing a good job in terms of low prices and efficient service, there will always be people who feel deprived of a voice in the control of the business and look for ways of achieving it.

"It is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate the economic value of the cooperative to the community. In Morell the people have paid themselves dividends of \$4,674 in ten years of credit union operation; they have paid themselves \$52,396 in patronage refunds from the cooperative store; they have marketed about \$500,000 worth of butter and by-products through their creamery, with small surpluses amounting to about \$4,400 in six years; they have handled a gross volume of \$82,000 worth of fish and lobster in two years. The effect on prices in the fish-marketing program would be impossible to estimate, but it is certainly true that the forty Morell fishermen are getting better prices by about twenty per cent than they would with no cooperative in operation. The village is also the possessor of a cooperative store building and inventory valued at \$55,000; a fish cannery valued at \$8,000; a potato warehouse valued at \$24,000; and various buildings--a new schoolhouse, new community hall, new skating rink, creamery--on which no appraisal is available but whose existence is directly due to the effects of the cooperatives. In a village of three hundred families these figures mean a good deal."

--(from "How People Can Work Their Way," mimeographed by International Friends of the Antigonish Movement, New York.)

RESULTS ARE LARGELY IN REALM OF INTANGIBLES

1. Local groups of people continuously study their situation.
2. An understanding of the situation has led to a feeling of security that was not possible before study clubs and co-ops were organized.
3. The cooperatives are regarded as educational agencies, in part.
4. The people have created and trained their own leaders.
5. The University continues to be identified with the movement.
6. Headquarters of the credit union league and the cooperative union of the province of Nova Scotia are on the campus. This relation is not without opposition, but the leaders of the University and the Church consistently support the movement.
7. Development of libraries has been encouraged.
8. Collective bargaining of isolated primary producers has been enhanced and their purchasing power has improved.
9. Important savings are reported to have been made in the marketing and purchasing processes.
10. The savings of the people are reported to have increased, e.g., over \$10,000,000 of assets in credit unions.
11. The people have made important capital improvements--fishing vessels, housing, factories.
12. Protestant-Catholic cooperation has been encouraged.
13. The revival of community cooperation is everywhere remarked.
14. Participation of the lowest of the low-income people was provided for. There is still a measure of poverty in Nova Scotia, but numerous disadvantaged people who were in despair have acquired confidence.
15. The Canadian government now makes an annual grant for the extension program among the fishermen. "The movement takes people off relief."
16. The entire program is "conservative"--it has enabled people to acquire property to conserve.
17. The motivation of the program is religious. The techniques are in accord with the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church which emphasizes the wide diffusion of the ownership of private property and voluntary organization of economic groups.

Conversely, Catholic teaching is, of course, opposed to complete state control of the economy. The rise of communism in Canada has probably been only a minor factor making for support of the Antigonish Movement. The incidence of communism among the miners is now less remarked than twenty-five years ago. Indirectly, the movement has discouraged Communist agitation by removing conditions which breed communism. Roman Catholic teaching also unequivocally sanctions co-operatives, including credit unions, marketing, purchasing, housing, etc.

The educators at St. Francis Xavier are training students from Latin America. They have been of direct aid to cooperatives in the U.S.A. They aided in the establishment of the advisory councils or discussion circles of the Ohio Farm Bureau. They have advised the staff of the United Nations administering technical assistance programs.

Perhaps the program can be summed up in terms of strong personalities, comprehensive techniques, religious motivation, and a university willing to be closely related to a social movement. At this University I find a sense of movement that I have never found at any other. "Education, to be good, should be linked with some activity." The people act in their own capacities, however, not in the name of the University.